



# Utah's Legislators Back to School

-a year round civic education program-

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## BACKGROUND and BACKBONE America's Legislators Back to School Program

### Why a Legislators Back to School Program?

Legislators Back to School is designed to help students understand the pressures and conflicts that legislators face, and to help legislators understand how students feel about issues that affect their lives. To meet these objectives, legislators and students engage in meaningful discussions, participate in mock sessions or simulated public hearings, and draft bills together. Through hands-on experience, students learn about their civic responsibilities, to value their constitutional freedoms, and prepare to be educated voters.

Because of the growing distrust in government and decline in voting among young voters across the nation, a civic education initiative was launched within the last decade and Congress passed a bill that earmarked millions for a civic education project, Representative Democracy in America. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress, monies are shared by these project partners: NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures), CCE (Center for Civic Education), and Center on Congress at Indiana University.

Money funded to NCSL goes directly to the Trust for Representative Democracy and funds the supplemental materials produced by NCSL that are available to legislators who participate in America's Legislators Back to School Program. NCSL established America's Legislators Back to School Week in 1999 as a pilot program and with only several participating states. In 2000, it spread nationwide and Utah became active in the program. In 2005, the week-long event turned into a year-round program to provide scheduling flexibility to legislators and schools. Each state personalizes the program name, thus Utah's Legislators Back to School Program.

### How does Utah rank?

#### 2009-2010

Utah ranked #(TBA) in the nation with 91 percent legislator participation (95 legislators).

#### 2008-2009

Utah ranked #1 in the nation again with 94 percent legislator participation (98 legislators).

#### 2007-2008

Utah ranked #2 in the nation with 88 percent legislator participation (92 legislators).

#### 2006-2007

Utah ranked #2 in the nation with 80 percent legislator participation (83 legislators). Massachusetts reported 100% participation, a first for any state to accomplish since the program's inception.

#### 2005-2006

Utah ranked #1 in the nation as legislator participation climbed to 81 percent, and participating students climbed to 18,210 in 220 schools.

#### 2004

Utah remained in the top three nationwide; 74 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* July/August 2005). Legislators reached even more students than the previous year climbing to approximately 17,200 in 200 schools.

#### 2003

Utah ranked #2 in the nation; 68 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* January 2004). Legislators reached approximately 16,500 students in 165 schools.

## 2002

Utah ranked #1 in the nation in 2002; 92 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* March 2003). Legislators reached approximately 9,000 students in 90 Utah schools in 2002. Legislators, judges, and attorneys joined together in the Dialogue on Freedom program that was initiated by the Utah State Bar to benefit students following the tragic events of 9-11.

### How does Utah encourage participation?

The Utah State Legislature has passed a concurrent resolution urging the participation of schools and legislators in this valuable civics education program for the past five years. A concurrent resolution, by definition, expresses the position of the state on a specific matter and has the prior support of the governor.

- 2008 - SCR 2, Resolution Promoting Legislators Back to School Program (*Sen. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2007 - SCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Sen. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2006 - HCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2005 - HCR 6, Resolution Recognizing Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)
- 2004 - HCR 7, Resolution Recognizing Legislators Back to School Week (*Rep. Kory Holdaway*)
- 2003 - SCR 3, Resolution Designating Legislators Back to School Week (*Sen. Howard Stephenson*)

District superintendents receive a letter from legislative leadership inviting them to encourage their principals to welcome legislators into their schools to assist teachers in their vital civic education efforts.

For teachers and principals, the Utah's Legislators Back to School Program Web site provides detailed information about how to best prepare students for a meaningful experience with a legislator.

A packet is given to each legislator containing: a list of the schools K-12 in their voting district; samples of supplemental materials; and other helpful information that may include a copy of the letter sent to each district superintendent signed by legislative leadership and a personalized letter encouraging the legislator to bring civics to life in the classroom.

The program coordinator provides motivational reminders to legislators throughout the year, corresponds with key teacher contacts throughout Utah, and markets the civic education program with articles, press releases, and a Web site.

### Web sites of Interest

**Civic Education - Utah's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.le.utah.gov/lrgc/backtoschool.htm>  
**Description of Supplemental Materials** - <http://www.le.state.ut.us/lrgc/backtoschoolinfo/supplementalmaterials.pdf>  
**How to Schedule a Classroom Visit** - <http://www.le.state.ut.us/lrgc/backtoschoolinfo/howtoschedulevisit.htm>  
**Lesson Plans K-12** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonplans.htm>  
**Overview of America's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/bksdesc.htm>  
**Partner Organizations for America's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/partners.htm>  
**State Stats: Top Ten Legislature Participation** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/topten.htm> (Note: 2003 statistics in *State Legislatures* January 2004 should reflect Utah legislator participation at 68 percent)  
**The Center on Congress at Indiana University Interactive Web site for Kids** - <http://www.democracykids.org/>  
**Trust for Representative Democracy** - <http://www.ncsl.org/trust/>

For additional assistance, contact Shelley Day, Legislative Information Liaison  
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